

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
/073 W

-----115444 060331Z /66

R 041914Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7545
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 1576

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SHUM, ES
SUBJECT: PEASANT UNREST IN EL SALVADOR

REFS: SAN SALVADOR 1446, 1484, AND 1494

SUMMARY: SERIOUS QUESTIONS ARE RAISED BY THE RURAL
DISTURBANCES WHICH BEGAN DURING HOLY WEEK AND LED TO AN
EXODUS OF PEASANTS FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE AND SATELLITE
COMMUNITIES (CANTONES) IN THE 35,000-INHABITANT VICINITY
OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF SAN PEDRO PERULAPAN, DEPARTMENT OF CUS-
CATLAN. PERHAPS THE MOST DRAMATIC QUESTION ASKS TO WHAT EXTENT
THESE EVENTS COULD PORTEND A PEASANT UPRISING SUCH AS OCCURRED
HERE IN 1932 AND HAS COLORED NATIONAL THINKING EVER SINCE.

1. ORIGINS: IT IS STILL NOT CLEAR EXACTLY HOW THE
HOLY WEEK DISTURBANCES BEGAN. EYEWITNESSES STATE THAT
EARLY IN THE WEEK STRANGERS BEGAN TO APPEAR IN THE SMALL
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COMMUNITIES OF THE REGION. ACCORDING TO THE GOVERNMENT
VERSION, FECCAS, UTC, AND BPR AGITATORS THEN BEGAN TO
PRESS LOCAL POPULACE TO "JOIN US OR DIE," WITH PARTICULAR
VIOLENCE AIMED AT PRO-GOVERNMENT ORDEN MEMBERS OF THESE
COMMUNITIES. ANTI-GOES VERSION, IN CONTRAST,
MAINTAINS THAT THE INITIATIVE FOR VIOLENCE CAME FROM ORDEN
ELEMENTS INTENT UPON DESTROYING LEADERSHIP AND CADRES OF FECCAS,

UTC AND BPR. WHAT DOES APPEAR CLEAR, HOWEVER, IS THAT FECCAS/UTC/BPR STRENGTH SURPRISED GOES AND THAT VIOLENCE AND COUNTERVIOLENCE TOUCHED OFF CONFLAGRATION OF UNEXPECTED PROPORTIONS WITH OPPOSING FACTIONS SEIZING OPPORTUNITY TO SETTLE OLD SCORES AND ENHANCE THEIR RESPECTIVE POSITIONS. ESTIMATES OF DEAD RANGE FROM 29 TO 200.

2. EXODUS: INNOCENT BYSTANDERS PRECIPITOUSLY DEPARTED SATELLITE COMMUNITIES FOR SAN PEDRO PERUPALAN, WITH SOME EVEN COMING ON TO SAN SALVADOR. REPRESENTATIVES OF PRO-GOES GROUPS, ORDEN, APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SPECIAL TARGETS AND TO HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY DISPLACED FROM AREA. THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT VERSION SUGGESTS, HOWEVER, THAT THE AREA WAS IN FACT EVACUATED BY SECURITY FORCES TO CLEAR WAY FOR REPRESSIVE OPERATION. AN UNCERTAIN NUMBER OF PERSONS (SOME ESTIMATES RANGE UP TO 3,000) MAY HAVE LEFT THEIR HOMES DURING THE CONFLICT AND TO THOSE WHO ASSISTED THEM THEY TOLD WIDELY DIFFERING TALES WHICH FOUND WAY INTO OPPOSITING COMMUNIQUE AND LOCAL PRESS.

3. SECURITY FORCES: GOES CLAIMS THAT ITS SECURITY FORCES INITIALLY TOOK PASSIVE ROLE, EVEN WHEN IT APPEARED SMALL AREA OF NATIONAL TERRITORY WAS IN HANDS OF THOSE WHOM GOES CONSIDERED SUBVERSIVES. LATER SWEEP OF AREA BY SECURITY FORCES RESTORED CONTROL TO GOES WITHOUT ANY SIGNIFICANT CONFLICT.
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4. PRISONERS: AN INDETERMINATE NUMBER OF PERSONS WERE ARRESTED BY SECURITY FORCES AND CHARGED WITH SUBVERSIVE ACTS. MANY HAVE ALREADY BEEN RELEASED BOTH BY SECURITY FORCES AND JUDICIAL SYSTEM. OF THOSE SHOWN IN NEWSPAPER PHOTOGRAPHS, MOST SEEMED HUMBLE PEASANTS WHO COULD BE SEEN AS "TERRORISTS" ONLY BY GREAT STRETCH OF IMAGINATION. MANY ADMITED TO BEING MEMBERS OF FECCAS OR UTC, REPORTEDLY TOLD OF INCITATION BY ONE OR MORE PRIESTS, BUT STOUTLY DENIED ANY TERRORIST ACTIVITY. SOME OF THESE EVEN SAID THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE PASSING OUT PAMPHLETS FOR "FOCCO," ANOTHER BUT GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED ORGANIZATION FOR RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.

5. UNUSUAL CHURCH RESTRAINT: GOES COMMUNIQUE VERGED ON HYSTERIA AND DISPLAYED DISPROPORTIONATE ANTI-CHURCH BIAS WITH PRESIDENTIAL INFORMATION SECRETARY PLAYING AN UNCHARACTERISTICALLY VOCIFEROUS ROLE IN SUPPORT OF GOES POSITION. CHURCH STATEMENTS CAME OFF SOMEWHAT BETTER AND WERE UNUSUALLY RESTRAINED IN ANTI-GOES CONTENT. ARCHBISHOP MADE A POINT OF DIS-ASSOCIATING CHURCH FROM FECCAS AND UTC. PROSPECTS FOR CHURCH-STATE RAPPROCHEMENT HAVE BEEN SET BACK BY OVER-ALL INCIDENT

AND SUBSEQUENT EXCHANGES.

6. RURAL INSTABILITY: WITH RESTORATION OF CALM TO SAN PEDRO PERULAPAN AREA, AGITATORS SEEM TO HAVE DEPARTED SCENE AND PEASANTS ARE RETURNING TO THEIR HOMES. WHEREABOUTS OF "AGITATORS" UNKNOWN BUT SOURCE OF SOME CONCERN TO GOE. THINKING PEOPLE HERE ARE ALSO DISTURBED BY INTENSITY OF EVENTS AND RAPIDITY WITH WHICH A LOCAL SITUATION ERUPTED. FOR SOME OBSERVERS, THE CAUSE WAS PURE COMMUNISM AND AGITATION. FOR OTHERS, IT WAS SHEER MISERY ON PART OF OPPRESSED PEASANTS. TO STILL OTHER CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS THIS LOOKS LIKE PURPOSEFUL PROBE OF OPENING BATTLE IN WAR WHICH THEY SEE AS NOW DELCARED BY CATHOLIC CHURCH IN EL SALVADOR. FOR US, THE IMPORTANT QUESTION IS WHETHER

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SAN PEDRO PERULAPAN IS SPECIAL, UNIQUE, PROBLEM-PRONE AREA, OR WHETHER ENTIRE COUNTRYSIDE IS MADE UP OF SOME HUNDREDS OF SAN PEDRO PERULAPANS. OMNIPRESENT IN SOME SALVADORANS' THINKING IS PEASANT UPRISING OF 1932 AND QUESTION WHETHER HISTORY COULD REPEAT ITSELF. HOPEFULLY THIS CONCERN PLUS RECOGNITION OF UPWARD TREND IN UNREST MAY IMPACT IN SOME POSITIVE WAY ON LOCAL AND GOES ATTITUDES TOWARD NEED FOR EARLY ATTENTION TO PROBLEMS OF THE PEASANT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CIVIL DISORDERS, RURAL AREAS, ALLEGATIONS, TERRORISTS, ARRESTS, SOCIAL CHANGE, CHURCH STATE RELATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978SANS01576
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780148-0072
Format: TEL
From: SAN SALVADOR
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780494/aaaadciv.tel
Line Count: 145
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 05217db6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 SAN SALVADOR 1446
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3080592
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PEASANT UNREST IN EL SALVADOR
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SHUM, SOCI, ES
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/05217db6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014